



Region 2 Headquarters
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804
Phone 406-542-5500

June 13, 2018

Dear Interested Citizen:

Enclosed you will find for your review, a proposal for Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) to accept assignment (delegation) of the "right of public access" component of a conservation easement (CE) to be held by the Montana Land Reliance (MLR) on the Dry Cottonwood Creek and Deer Lodge River Ranches (the Ranches) in Deer Lodge County. The Ranches are comprised of a diverse mix of habitats, including 5.5 miles of the Clark Fork River, forest, big game winter range, and irrigated meadows and pastures, which support elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer and antelope. MLR would purchase a CE on the Ranches to protect the water resources, wildlife habitat, working agricultural ground, and public recreation opportunities currently present on 3,409 acres. MLR would then assign to FWP the rights portion of the CE that provides for public hunting access on the entire project area and public recreational access to the Clark Fork River Corridor. The Upper Clark Fork River Basin Remediation and Restoration Advisory Council voted on May 23, 2018, to recommend complete funding from the Montana Department of Justice Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) to complete this proposed project. No FWP funds would be used to acquire the proposed CE; therefore, the proposed action is for FWP to accept the assignment of the right of public access, in perpetuity, as further set forth in the CE to be held by MLR.

A draft environmental assessment (EA) for this proposal is available for review and comment. The EA may be obtained by mail from Region 2 FWP, 3201 Spurgin Rd., Missoula 59804; phoning 406-542-5500; emailing shrose@mt.gov; or viewing FWP's Internet website <http://fwp.mt.gov> ("News," then "Public Notices"; beginning June 12). Comments may be made online on the EA webpage or may be directed by mail or email to the addresses above. Comments must be received by FWP no later than July 12, 2018.

FWP will hold a public hearing in Deer Lodge on June 26 at 7:00 p.m. at the Elks Lodge (230 Main Street) to discuss the right-of-public-access assignment of the conservation easement, answer questions and take public comment.

As part of the decision-making process under the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), I plan to issue the Decision Notice for this EA soon after the end of the public comment period. The Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission has the decision-making authority for FWP acquisition of interests in land, and the Commission will be asked to render its decision on this proposal at its August 9th meeting in Helena.

Sincerely,

Randy Arnold
Regional Supervisor

RA/sr